The Middle East and North Africa in the lens of Marxist international relations theory

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA IN THE LENS OF MARXIST INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

The history of Marxist research in International Relations[1] theory and the MENA region reveals something of a gap between two distinct bodies of thought. On the one hand, scholars working both in English and French and in the languages of the Middle East have adopted Marxist frameworks for understanding the specificities of state and society in the Middle East (see Amin 1976; 1988; Ayubi 1995; Batatu 2004; Bromley 1994) and in turn influenced Marxist theory beyond the region[2]. On the other hand, Marxists outside of

[1] In this chapter, 'IR' and 'International Relations' refer to the scholarly discipline, and 'international relations' without captialisation to the phenomena studied by that discipline.

[2] Needless to say, there is a wide-ranging Marxist literature on the social structures of the Middle East and North Africa and the relationship between these and the international relations of the region in Arabic, Persian and other languages. Since this chapter is intended a research survey in English for undergraduate and post-graduate students, that material will not be (directly) covered here: however as recommendations for the Arabophone reader, Mehdi 'Amil's *Fi-l-Tanaqud (On Contradiction)* (Al-

the Middle East - reflecting the post-Cold War concentration of imperialist powers on the region - have conducted debates about the relationship between capitalism and the states system with reference to events *in* the Middle East but not a theory *of* the specific character of that relationship in the region (see Callinicos 2003; Callinicos 2007; Callinicos 2009; Harvey 2003; Wood 2005; Hardt and Negri 2000). This dichotomy reflects a broader problem, with IR theory as a whole and not just its Marxist variant, to which Justin Rosenberg refers as 'the classical lacuna'(Rosenberg 2006, 310). This 'lacuna' refers to the separation of geopolitical- external logics of explanation from sociological-internal ones - seen as a particularly risky distortion in regions, such as the Middle East, where the

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Farabi; Beirut 1973) and *Fi-Naamat Al-Intaj-Al-Kuluniyali* (*On the Colonial Mode of Production)* (Al-Farabi; Beirut 1976) provide significant (and dense) contributions to Marxist theory that in many ways predate and prefigure the discussion of articulation of modes of production. For surveys of Marxist and Marxist-influenced thought in Arabic in particular, see chapters 7 and 8 of Ibrahim Abu-Rabi' *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Intellectual History* (Pluto, London 2003). Readers may also find useful the special section on 'The Arab Left in Egypt and Lebanon' in *Arab Studies Journal* 24:1 (Spring 2016), edited by Sune Haugbolle and Manfred Sing.

formation of the states' system itself was both born of external intervention and deeply intertwined with 'domestic' social change. In essence, all of the Marxist research discussed in this chapter grapples with this problem. However, a group of scholars influenced by the idea of 'uneven and combined development' (UCD) have attempted to move beyond the dichotomy in the study of the Middle East by arguing that there are no purely 'internal' social relations, nor asocial external ones - and that the Middle East is therefore not as exceptional as has been made out (see Allinson 2016; Matin 2006; 2007; 2013b; 2011; 2013a; Nisancioglu 2014; Tansel 2015; 2016). The challenge to understanding posed by this dichotomy sharpened with the uprisings and revolutions of 2011 in the Arab world, leaving Marxists divided between those who identified with the uprisings as class-driven revolts ('domestic' social change) and those who saw in them, especially in Syria and Libya, imperialist attempts ('external' geopolitics) to continue the US 'regime change' efforts of the early 2000s.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a survey of Marxist approaches to the study of International Relations theory in the Middle East, within the context of the on-going dilemma sketched out above. Rather than cover the various themes of Middle East international relations (Palestine and Zionism, Islamism etc) the chapter first presents Marxism as an IR approach, and the particular contribution of Marxists from the Middle East, such as Samir Amin and Nazih Ayubi to that intellectual tradition, as well as that of the most well-known IR scholars to have researched the through a Marxist lens, Fred Halliday. The chapter then considers the expansion of debates around capitalism and the states system at the turn of the twenty-first century, sparked by US intervention in the Middle East, and how these related to scholarship on the region itself. The chapter then discusses attempts overcome the 'classical lacuna' by use of the framework of UCD. In the final section, the chapter considers responses in Marxist scholarship to the revolutionary uprisings of 2011, and their aftermath. Although Marxist elements are often

incorporated into IR frameworks of analysis of the Middle East (see Hinnebusch 2003; 2011) and there is considerable overlap with, for example, feminist work on the region (see Said, Meari, and Pratt 2015), this chapter will focus on works with an explicitly Marxist focus and their implications for IR scholarship on the Middle East.

Marxism, Dependency, and the Middle East

Marxism has been seen by realist IR scholars such as Ken Waltz as the epitome of 'second image' theory (Waltz 1959, 125–6). That is to say, being concerned with social relations *within* societies, Marxists have little to say about relations *between* them. In this sense, Marxism can be seen as at one pole of the dichotomy drawn between domestic, social forms of explanation and geopolitical-external ones. However, as noted below, there is in fact a long tradition of Marxist theory that attempts to grapple with this dichotomy, in which theory from and about the Middle East has played a central role.

Before examining these, a brief presentation of the basic concepts of Marxism may be necessary[3]. Marxism is a 'materialist' form of theory: that is, it seeks explanations in the material conditions of humans, 'both those which they find existing and those produced by their activity' (Marx and Engels 1999).

This basic proposition often leads to the accusation that Marxism is a kind of economic reductionism, explaining all phenomena by reference to immediate economic interest and groups formed around such interests (i.e. classes). In a field such as IR, wherein conflicts appear to concern power and security, or a region such as the Middle East, where forms of non-economic linguistic or religious identity seem to hold such great sway, this criticism may seem debilitating.

[3] The corpus of works by Marx and Engels, let alone their followers and epigones, is of course vast. The interested reader should consult the primary texts, especially *Capital Volume 1*, and *The German Ideology* – for Marxism as it relates to IR, Anthony Brewer's *Marxist Theories of Imperialism: A critical survey* (Routledge, London, 1980), and the collections *Marxism and World Politics: Contesting Global Capitalism* edited by Alex Anievas (Routledge, London 2010) and *Historical Materialism and Globalisation* edited by Hazel Smith (Routledge, London, 2002) will be useful.

However, it should be noted that Marxism is not a theory of 'economic reductionism' but rather one of how 'economies' come to exist, function and persist, about how 'surplus' is 'pumped out' through the 'direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers' (Marx 1978, 927). There are different forms of society based upon different such relations - these are the 'modes of production'. Marx was mainly concerned with the capitalist mode, in which the direct producers are neither owned nor own the means of production and hence their exploitation is concealed by the wage they receive in return for using those means of production to produce surplus value for the capitalist. Marxists after Marx have been fundamentally concerned with two questions regarding international relations i) what is the relationship between capitalism (a social system) and the international system of states and ii) why and how did capitalism expand into non-capitalist societies? Since the Middle East was both victim of rivalry between the Great Powers of the early twentieth century, and the site of 'late

developing' capitalism, it is no surprise that theorists from the region made great contributions to answering these questions in their own context. The most influential of these has been Samir Amin and his reworking of dependency theory.

To explain Amin's contribution, one must first understand the intellectual and historical context. Born in Cairo in 1931, Amin both experienced and saw the end of direct European colonialism in the Arab world. His work is both motivated by and offers lessons to the anti-colonial struggle and its inheritors, particularly to build upon the theory of imperialism elaborated in earlier form by Vladimir Lenin (Matin 2007) and Nikolai Bukharin (Bukharin 1973). Although Amin has differences with other dependency theorists (see for examples, Frank 1971; 1978; 2010; Hopkins 1982; Wallerstein 1974) there is a common thread: the division of the states of the world into an economic hierarchy of core and periphery (possibly with the inclusion of a 'semi-periphery') in which the former domi-

nates the latter. Samir Amin's work concerns how the periphery came to occupy its position and how it can escape.

Samir Amin's chief contribution was two-fold: first conception of a 'tributary mode of production', in which the Islamic Middle East played a central role, and second, that distinct national societies are best conceived as 'social formations' in which different modes of production are contained. The tributary mode 'adds to a still-existing village community a social and political apparatus for the exploitation of this community through the exaction of tribute' (Amin 1976:13). The pre-capitalist era was characterised by three centres of such tributary power: in China, India, and the Islamic Empires of the Middle East. In this model, Europe was itself a periphery of the Eurasian tributary systems, and the feudalism of Western Europe simply a variant of the overall tributary mode (1988, 5–7). However, Amin argues, the non-European world has been relegated to peripheral status under capitalism thanks to 'unequal exchange'(Amin 1976, 143–9).

Amin also makes an argument that is echoed in other Marxist theories of the Middle East, and indeed the broader post-colonial world. This is to draw a historical distinction between Western Europe, in which capitalism conquered social formations in their entirety and replaced pre-existing modes of production, and peripheral social formations in which capitalism does not occupy the entire social space but is integrated with pre-capitalist forms depending upon the timing and nature of the 'external attack' of European colonialism (1976, 294). Amin's recommendation therefore is the 'delinking' of the periphery from the global economic system (1988; 1990).

The key concepts of the capitalist peripheralisation of the Middle East, and the hybridity of social forms in the region, appear in an even higher theoretical register in the work of Nazih Ayubi. Often thought of as a scholar of the comparative politics of Arab states, Ayubi's work defies such categorisation, the central processes and

dynamics of Arab state formation he identifies being both 'external' and 'internal'.

Ayubi's takes a materialist approach, primarily influenced by (certain interpretations of) the work of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci (1995). Ayubi's specific concern is why Arab states in particular seem 'so easily able to switch regional and international alliances'(1995:1). Ayubi, like Amin, eradicates border between internal and external relations in the social formations of the Middle East by extending the idea of the 'articulation' of modes of production, drawing on an extensive debate in the general Marxist literature (Alavi et al. 1982; Foster-Carter 1978; Laclau 1977; Wolpe 1980). As with Amin, Ayubi argues 'that modes of production in the Middle East are often not singular and uni-dimensional but rather are articulated (i.e. two or modes can often coexist and interlink); and (b) that in many Middle Eastern social formations there is little correspondence among the various 'instances' or manifestations of structural power in society' (1995:26). Ayubi adopts this

approach to argue that in the Arab state modes of production, coercion and consent are dislocated or non-correspondent (1995:27).

It is the nature and origin of these 'instances' that render Ayubi's theory one of IR rather than just domestic political structure. This dislocation and articulation means that the state faces great difficulties mobilising a 'historic bloc' that would embed its rule in civil society: on the one hand the state therefore becomes fierce but brittle in its relations with internal society and 'circulationist' (in the sense of redistributing rents acquired from outside) in its external relations (1995:25). The succession of anti-colonial, or 'pan' (pan-Arab, pan-Islamist) ideologies that have arisen in the region should therefore be seen precisely as attempts to 'interpellate' a 'historic bloc' of classes around a particular conception of the state, society and individual: the result of which, if successful, is the 'integral state' (1995:8). The Arab state in particular is thus caught between its 'circulationist' role, mainly facilitating the flow of capital out of

and between countries, and the various forms of indigenous reaction to that role.

If Ayubi and Amin represent the high water-mark of scholarship understanding state-society relations in the Middle East using a Marxist framework, we must turn elsewhere for this works that set the international relations of the region in a global context. The most notable of these is Fred Halliday. Halliday, in his prolific writings across three decades, both contributed to an attempt to reconstruct historical materialism in IR (1994; 1999; 2002b), the Middle East as a region (1995; 2002a; 2005) and particular countries within it (1979; 1990). However, these two aspects of Halliday's work - although undoubtedly informing each other - did not come together in a systemic framework.

The key themes Halliday's intellectual project were expressed in his first major work *Arabia without Sultans,* the fruit of a long personal engagement with the Dhofari rebels of Oman in the People's Front for the Liberation of the Arab Gulf (PFLAG) (2002a, 2nd:1–

5). Although expressed in more explicitly Marxist terms in his early works, these remained a constant throughout his work: the rejection of culturalist explanations –'mystified flummery' - for the politics of the region and the need to replace these with a universalist, materialist method, and to defend these against what he saw as new variants of arguments based on cultural authenticity (1993). In this, and his support for the 1991 Gulf War and castigation of the Western Left for what he saw as accommodation to Islamism (2011), Halliday continued the tradition of his teacher Bill Warren, the iconoclastic Marxist who argued that imperialism, far from retarding development, was a progressive force in promoting it (Warren 1980, 9).

The Middle East, Halliday argued was distinguished by being the site, not of straightforward confrontation between power blocs, but of 'regional manoeuvre and initiative' by 'states and social movements' especially during the Cold War (2005, 97). Halliday's contributions to IR in general were linked to his studies of the region:

most of all his contention that revolutions were international in both their causes and effects but unjustly ignored by IR theory was informed by his work on Iran and Yemen (1999, xv) . 'Uneven and combined development' was the 'inescapable context' for this significance, but Halliday did not elaborate further on this theoretical insight in relation to the Middle East or broader IR (1999, 319).

If Fred Halliday's work was characterised by a wealth of empirical research, with less concentration on theory-building, the opposite may be true of Simon Bromley, whose concise book *Rethinking Middle East Politics*, repays reading some decades after its publication. Bromley, like Halliday, focuses on the state formation process in the region, with an approach of 'analytical universality' without any assumption of 'empirical homogeneity' (Bromley 1994, 99). Bromley sets materialist parameters for any such account of state formation in the Middle East, which he argues did not differ significantly from that in other areas of the Global South: that it must

'relate the development of the state apparatus to the changing nature of those social relations which govern the material production of the society concerned' and the resulting patterns of state formation are shaped by integration into the world market (1994, 99).

The Iraq War of 2003 and the Middle East and North Africa in International Relations

The scholars surveyed above (with the exception of Bromley) largely represent a generation concerned to provide a Marxist analysis of the Middle East and North Africa as a region in its own right. Their roots lay in the anti-colonial, socialist and youth movements of the 1960s and their research on the subordinate position of the Middle East was explicitly linked to the global context provided by those movements and the Cold War order against which they rebelled.

In this section, I consider a later genre of Marxist work on the Middle East and North Africa - or rather work in which the region

features heavily in arguments about the global system. This revival of Marxist IR scholarship occurred around and in response to the US-led war on and occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the unprecedented mass anti-war mobilisations it provoked. The debates below therefore primarily refract arguments about the global relationship between capitalism and the states system through the experience of the Middle East circa 2003 rather than being theories about the region itself.

It is necessary to outline some of the context in which this body of theory emerged and for which it is itself an explanation. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union had both brought about a slew of intellectual production proclaiming the death of Marxism - despite the long dissociation of Marxist theory from the ossified state structures of the USSR - and resulted in a unipolar world dominated by the United States. Conflict in that world, it was argued by policy intellectuals such as Francis Fukuyama or Samuel Huntington, would derive not from the clash of

opposing social and economic orders and their motivating ideologies, but from cultural holdouts to the expansion of the dominant liberal, democratic and capitalist model. War and insecurity would occur, but these would be wars over values, not territory, power or economic interest: and with the expansion of the liberal model a state of peace amongst a world of democracies might eventually be reached.

The Middle East and North Africa as a region came to represent an obstacle to this process. Largely untouched by the 'wave' of transitions to parliamentary democracy in the rest of the Global South an Eastern Europe in the 1980s and 1990s, home to 'rogue states' and terrorist groups that rejected the new global order, the region itself became seen as a problem in need of international management. The opening salvo of this effort might be seen as the Gulf War of 1991 against Iraq, under the direction of US President George Bush culminating in the invasion of the same country by his son, President George W. Bush in 2003.

Such was the context for a revival of Marxist interest in international relations, essentially revolving around the old question of the relationship between capitalism and the states system. This was posed anew by the paradoxical nature of the US war on Iraq in 2003: simultaneously displaying features of classical inter-state war, colonial occupation and liberal war for values. To explain the actions of the US in the Middle East would then inform a Marxist understanding of the relationship between capitalism and the states system as whole.

In broad outline, there were two sides to this debate: first those who saw the unprecedented military and economic dominance of the US, together with the expansion of global capital under the banner of free-market neo-liberalism, as heralding a new kind of system in which the 'logics' of capital and state were divorced (Harris 2004; Lacher 2002; Lacher and Teschke 2007; Robinson 2007). Second were those Marxists who defended the existence of such a fusion, albeit with some degree of autonomy in the inter-linking of

these ‘two logics’ (Ashman and Callinicos 2006; Callinicos 2007; Callinicos 2009; Harvey 2003).

Particularly influential on the latter argument was the thesis put forward by the Marxist geographer, David Harvey. Harvey argued that the war on Iraq represented a ‘new imperialism’: the link between capital and state was not severed, or overcome by the former at the expense of the latter but reinstated in a new way (Harvey 2003, 29–36). Harvey’s argument is a complex one but his direct explanation for the 2003 war is relatively simple and familiar: it was to control the supply of oil in the global market to ensure US leverage over competitor states such as China (2003, 19–24). Harvey’ s argument thus provided for a revision and restatement of the ‘Lenin-Bukharin’ version of imperialism, in which the interests of capital and states - or as Harvey puts it the two logics - are merged with belligerent results (2003, 33–4). This argument was put even more strongly by Alex Callinicos, who argued that the explanation

for the US invasion of Iraq required a 'Realist moment' (albeit no more than a moment) in Marxist theory (Callinicos 2005, 307).

The 2003 Iraq war thus led to an expansion and revival of Marxist theory in international relations, most especially the Marxist theory of imperialism. However, this scholarship was largely concerned with US policy *in* the Middle East, rather than the international relations *of* the Middle East as such. The lines of this debate, particularly that over whether late capitalist imperialism is constituted by a single pole, the USA or whether it was characterised by renewed competition between powers such as the USA and Russia with reverberations in the region, was to return with a vengeance in the aftermath of the revolutionary uprisings of 2011. Before examining the Marxist response to those events, however, a necessary detour must be taken into that scholarship that seeks to resolve through the 'classical lacuna' in the study of Middle East IR by means of 'uneven and combined development.'

UCD and the International Relations of the Middle East

The debates amongst Marxists on the relationship between capitalism and the states system led to a revival of the concept of 'uneven and combined development' associated with the Russian Revolutionary Leon Trotsky (Trotsky, 1972a:29-38), and of particular interest to scholars of the Middle East. The concept, originally introduced to provide a strategic understanding for Russian revolutionaries, has been extended since in both its chronological scope (see Callinicos and Rosenberg, 2008, Matin, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2007, Rosenberg, 1996, Rosenberg, 2006) and problem area (Dufour, 2007, Lacher and Teschke, 2007, Shilliam, 2009, Teschke, 2003).

Trotsky's began from the recognition of the international character of the world capitalist system. He argued that Russia's minority working class movement could successfully telescope the supposedly indispensable stages of bourgeois democracy and capitalist development into a single 'uninterrupted' or 'permanent' stage

from which it would necessarily promote socialist revolution internationally. The essence of Trotsky' argument might be summarized as the interaction of different patterns of social relations in a given society (or rather 'social formation') under the impact of the global expansion of capitalist social relations such that the distinct character of the resultant 'combined social formation' itself feeds back into the system of geopolitical competition that originally produced it. UCD, especially in the version associated with Justin Rosenberg thus offers a way of uniting social and geopolitical modes of argument (Rosenberg, 2005:8).

How does this claim relate to MENA? UCD does not subordinate 'social to 'international' explanation or vice versa. Rather it seeks to explain the international relations of the Middle East through the combined social formation brought about by the 'whip of external necessity' (see Turner 1999, 60–2 for a related argument). UCD thus offers historical sociological explanations but of forces that are themselves 'internationally' constituted. Thus, in uneven and com-

bined development the fusion of dissimilar social structures (or modes of production) within a single formation—represents the composite effect of geopolitical-military pressures establishing trajectories of social struggle that then feed back into 'international relations.'

The parallels between uneven and combined development, and the theoretical frameworks described above such as that of Samir Amin, will no doubt be clear. What distinguishes uneven and combined development, however, is in seeing the various attempts at 'catching up' in the Global South - proposed by Amin and other dependency theorists as a policy choice for newly independent states- as responses to the 'whip of external necessity', engendering new combined social formations in which the latest conquests of capitalist technique and structure root themselves into the pre-existing relations, transforming and subjecting them and creating peculiar relations of classes.

There is an emerging body of work on UCD in the Middle East. This includes the history of Iran (Matin 2006; 2007; 2009; 2011; 2013a; 2013b), Jordan (Allinson 2016) and the middle to late Ottoman Empire (Nisancioglu 2014; Tansel 2015; 2016). Matin argues that UCD is a trans-historical phenomenon, in particular with reference to Qajar Iran composed of 'a combination of different forms of authority (corresponding to different modes of socioeconomic organization) ruling over a particular geopolitical space' and relating to 'the (pre existing) social reproductive texture' without fundamentally transforming it (Matin 2007, 429). Matin extends this analysis to the history of modern Iran, rejecting the 'internalist' account of the Iranian revolutions of 1906-11 and 1979 (2006; 2013a).

Allinson takes a somewhat different tack in seeking to explain the post-independence geopolitical alignments of the weak and generally externally dependent Jordanian state (Allinson 2016). Whereas existing accounts sought explanations in precisely the di-

chotomy described above, between socially embedded Western and dis-embedded Arab, states Allinson argues that these alignments derive ultimately from the combined nature of the Jordanian social formation and the social struggles (2016, 15–18). This combined social formation, Allinson claims, can be traced back to a particular 'mechanism of combination' resulting from the incorporation of the sub-Damascene steppe lands into a system of capitalist world economy and sovereign states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (2016, 43–4). That mechanism comprised the replacement of 'brotherly tribute' (*khuwwa)* taken by pastoral nomadic groups from settled cultivators, with external subsidy mediated through the recruitment of such groups into the armed forces under the British mandate (2016, 69–70). It was the replacement of this subsidy that came to be the heart of disputes over Jordan's international alignment, reflecting a simultaneously 'social' and 'geopolitical' relationship.

Kerem Nisancioglu and Cemal Burak Tansel, focusing on the pivotal late Ottoman period, extend the argument that uneven and combined development predates the capitalist era, establishing a move towards a more post-colonial perspective. Nisancioglu argues, contra the existing account by which capitalist relations and the sovereign state system penetrated the Ottoman sphere from without, that the competitive role of the Ottoman empire in the early modern period was materially significant for the rise of capitalism itself (Nisancioglu 2014). For Cemal Burak Tansel, Marxist IR theory has displayed a 'deafening silence' towards the experience of the 'non-West' and especially the 'intervention by or interaction with domestic actors, conditions and structures' in the transformation of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century (Tansel 2015, 97; see also 2016).

Marxism, International Relations and the Arab Uprisings of 2011

The upheavals that shook in the Middle East from the end of 2011 should have provided fertile ground for Marxist scholarship of the International Relations of the region. The initial response to the revolutionary outburst was that the conventional assumptions of Middle East studies and IR had to be re-thought. The *prima facie* parallels (as well, of course, as very significant differences) of the dynamics of the Arab uprisings with previous revolutionary waves, their evident relation to years of socio-economic injustice, their striking passage across borders, and the consequent embroiling of external powers as military actors, seemed to offer an almost text-book case for Marxist analysis to form part of that process.

However, this promise was not to be achieved - reflecting, perhaps, the deep crisis into which the region sank, rather than the emergence of any new form of emancipatory politics. Savage, internationalised civil wars in Libya, Yemen and most of all Syria; the retrenchment of powerful and brutal counter-revolutions in Egypt and Bahrain; and the rise of the reactionary politics of the so-

called ‘Islamic State’ across the region mitigated such an outcome. To some degree, this confusion reflected a return of the same problem of ‘internal-external’ with which we opened this chapter: once the uprisings spread from firm Western allies such as Tunisia, Egypt and Bahrain to notionally ‘anti-imperialist’ regimes such as Libya and Syria, Marxists (both within and without the region) were fractured between those who prioritised opposition to US imperialism, sharpened by the experience of 2003, thereby led to play down the importance and indigenous character of the uprisings and those who identified with the popular uprisings against regimes of any type.

Marxist of the former kind tended to be concentrated outside of the region and be scholars of US imperialism rather than the Arab world as such - a perspective reflected in the leading journals of the Anglophone Left, based in the US and concerned first and foremost with American power. Thus Perry Anderson, long a lodestar for the Anglophone intellectual Left, in his magisterial survey of US for-

eign policy and its thinkers, dedicates almost no space to the indigenous factors for the uprisings, reducing them to a 'a crop of…positive developments for the US' (Anderson 2015, 141) – in itself a far from adequately defended proposition.

More robust analyses have been provided by two Marxist scholars in particular, both based at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London: Gilbert Achcar and Adam Hanieh. The latter has provided an analysis of a region much neglected in Marxist scholarship of the Middle East, and one that has played an increasingly important role since 2011: the Gulf states, oil producers or otherwise. Hanieh argues that one can no longer treat the economies of the region as separate blocs from which the Gulf can be excluded as a consequence of their linkage to global markets through oil rent: rather a class of '*Khaleeji* (Gulf) capital' interpenetrates all of the ruling classes of the Arab states (Hanieh 2011, 103–4; 2013, 136–141). These Gulf capitalist classes form not just a 'regional' but a 'domestic' factor in the politics of Arab states,

especially in the fiscal and political crises issuing from the uprisings of 2011. The different national versions of *khaleeji* capital are, as all capitalist classes, in competition with each other - for example in the contest between Qatar and Saudi Arabia for regional influence played out most notably across Egypt and Syria (2013, 262).

Hanieh rejects the dichotomy between 'state' and 'civil society', in which the latter is seen as the repository of a progressive free market rationality smothered by the former - the solution to the region's problems thereby being more free-market 'neoliberal' policies (2013, 6–8). Emphasising both the continued centrality of imperialism, and the restructuring of regional states to pursue neoliberal policies even further removed from public scrutiny, Hanieh traces the origins of the uprisings of 2011 to those policies rather than simply the absence of democratic governance (important though that is) in the region (2013, 14–15). A similar point is made in research making use of Neo- Gramscian frameworks to account

for the origins and course of the Egyptian revolution in particular, and its relationship to external pressure and international financial institutions (see De Smet 2016; Roccu 2013).

Gilbert Achcar, author of numerous books on the Middle East from a Marxist perspective (Achcar 2002; 2004; 2010; 2013; 2016), characterises the uprisings of 2011 and their subsequent dynamics as a region-wide battle between revolution and counter-revolution- or rather two forms of counter-revolution, the 'secular' authoritarian *anciens regimes* and the various forms of Islamism (Achcar 2016, 8–10). These regimes represent for Achcar – by contrast to Hanieh who tends to stress the commonality between capitalism in the Middle East and elsewhere – a particular 'modality' of the capitalist mode of production, in which the patrimonial nature of the state has blocked and fettered development, leading to the parlous economic situation behind the uprisings (2013, 20–30).

These counterrevolutionary forces to whom Achcar points, amongst them the Gulf states, Iran, and the 'Islamic state', repre-

sent not only ideological trends, or the confrontation between 'secularism and Islam' or sectarian minorities and majorities that features so heavily in mainstream analysis, but the competition of different ruling classes and imperialist powers in the regional system to co-opt or repress revolutionary movements (2016, 10–16). Primary amongst these are the chief source of regional counter-revolutionary power, Saudi Arabia, backer of the Sisi coup regime in Egypt, and funder of sectarianizing trends in the Syrian opposition (2016, 9–10). Iran, the other petro-Islamist contender for hegemony in the region, played a similar role in backing the Assad regime to the hilt (2016, 10). However, Achcar also identifies a third pole, associated with Qatar, Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood and – at least in the case of Egypt – the United States (2016, 67–70). Moreover, the role of Russia as an external imperialist force backing the counter-revolutionary Assad regime in Syria in concert with Iran, is also emphasised by Achcar - this sets his analysis apart

from, for example, that of his former collaborator Noam Chomsky (2016, 19).

Within the landscape of the post-2011 Middle East, wherein upuprisings have brought about neither popular revolutionary regimes nor even (with the possible exception of Tunisia) limited and constitutional 'bourgeois democracy', the phenomenon of the 'Islamic State' has proved particularly difficult for Marxists to analyse. Pre-existing Marxist analyses of Islamist movements, developed with a view to providing a political strategy in the face of those movements, varied from seeing them as a form of anti-imperialist resistance, to a variegated phenomenon dependent on their class position to consistent forces of reaction. The extreme cruelty of the Islamic State group, its outright exterminationist Sunni chauvinism, and focus on the destruction of revolutionary popular movements in Syria rather than the Assad regime has led even Marxist traditions that once shied away from the concept of 'Islamofascism' to discuss the group in such terms (Alexander

2015; Naisse 2015). The situation is complicated by the embroiling of Islamic State in a strategy of regional and global polarisation: the entry of simultaneous military campaigns by both the US and Russia, as well as Iran at one remove through its influence on the Iraqi government, notionally directed against the territorial gains of the group in Syria and Iraq. This is a situation difficult to understand purely within the lens of inter-imperialist competition and/or class struggle. Although Marxists have provided introductions to analysis of the Islamic State (Sulehria 2015; Hanieh 2015) that set its rise within the context of the revolutionary and counter-revolutionary dynamics since 2011, fuller work is yet to emerge.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a survey of Marxist research on the international relations of the Middle East and North Africa - at least that part of it that is widely available in English. As we have seen, the case of the Middle East has for Marxism - as for other theoretical traditions in International Relations - provided an espe-

cially marked disjuncture between geopolitical and social modes of explanation. This has been particularly important for Marxist research on the Middle East, given the long and continuing history of external imperialist intervention that has been constitutive of the states system in the region at the same time as the political economy of late-developing capitalism and consequent explosive class struggles has shaped and continues to shape ruling regimes and their geopolitical orders.

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